

Journal of Trip on Capt. G. Allan
Hancock's Motor Yacht "VELERO III"

Prefatory Note

In September of 1938, I was invited to join a group of Biologists on a cruise to San Miguel Id. primarily to collect live animals for the San Diego Zoo and to do some dredging in channel waters for the University of Southern California.

My own studies of shore and channel fauna during the previous 34 years made me most anxious to visit San Miguel Id. So I accepted with much pleasure.

Sept. 12/38

M. S. VELERO III

We left the slip on Terminal Id. at 5:30, pulled out to the outer harbor and dropped anchor till 11:00 p.m. when we headed for San Miguel. I awoke once or twice in the night to find scarcely any motion evident. On deck at 6:30. We were south of the middle part of Santa Rosa in a quite smooth sea and misty weather. A Mourning Dove was circling the ship but soon left us on its way south.

Sooty and Pink-footed Shear waters fairly common, and once in a while a Western gull visited us. Dropped anchor near the west end of San Miguel on the South shore about 8:00. The motor launch and two skiffs with nets and cages headed for the Sea Lion rookeries where both Calif. and Steller Sea Lions were barking and roaring. The Stellers are beautiful golden animals of great size when grown. Cows may be almost white and pups whitish with dark areas about eyes and chest. That is, we suppose these are stellers. The colors are most variable. The bark of the Californias is the familiar note of long acquaintance.

The Stellers have a growling roar. Pups bleat almost like calves at times. Am not quite sure of the calif note always. Four were caught in a large net while a party of us went ashore with nets to try to rush some of those on the sand spit. Much to my surprise, six of these proved to be young Elephant Seals. Dr. Wegeforth did not seem so surprised since they have been reported to him before in the last few years. One old ♂ was shot off La Jolla and brought to the zoo.

There was an indescribable racket that almost deafened us. We were able to approach quite closely along the beach before they took off. The Elephant Seals were not shy at all and I came up and slapped them on the flanks, to be met with an open snarling mouth but little other activity. They finally were induced to move off after the fashion of the Harbor Seal with hind flippers straight back and caterpillar undulation. None of the adults were visible though the mate claimed these were sucklings. As the Sea Lions swam about in the near shore waters, I was surprised to see the short stump of a tail held up at a sharp angle. This was new to me.

Saunderella were flying about in flocks of a thousand or so. Sanderlings next and Black Turnstones, Godwits, Curlew, Wetn. Sandpiper, one Ruddy Turnstone, 3 Oystercatchers, Raven, Say Phoebe, Royal Tern (?), some Wren were noted ashore. Skulls of Stellers were not uncommon on the beach but the facial portion drops away as in the case of California. Many carcasses of California were in various stages of decay (and odor) but no Stellers were found. Indian mounds are less abundant than on the north side of San Nicolas. Also, the bones are less firmly preserved. Short-tailed Albatross was found but no dog. Sea Otter fairly common and a weathered skull and several jaws were picked up. Land snails were everywhere in the middens. Dr. Lloyd found three live ones among the ground plants.

Tried the searchlight after dark but got no glimpse of bird life. No Gull other than Westerns has been seen. The Sabine Gulls particularly have been looked for, but they must be a later bird.

September 13, Tuesday.

We had gone back toward the east end of the island last evening for a more quiet anchorage. It was very quiet too with no perceptible sea. This morning I came on deck at 6:30 to find the sun shining. The Santa Rosa Channel and the west end of that island was visible across a glassy sea. The fog was piling over the crest of the island just to the west of us. Sooty Shearwaters were moving westward outside over anchorage in continuous streams. Small fry were roughing the surface in large areas but the Shearwaters paid no attention. Western Gulls would fly toward the spots but would settle on the surface among them without any attempt to catch them.

We hove up the anchor about seven and ran back to the rookery where we worked yesterday, picking up a breeze as soon as we got well out. We laid a plan to bring back the five Elephant Seals we saw there yesterday but only two of them were there. One of those got away after we had the net over him by wallowing into the surf where he dragged three men till he worked loose. The other one was backed up onto the strand and the net roped down over his head. Mr. Olmstead then got astride of him like a cowboy and yanked his head around every time he made for the water. He was soon safely crated up for his trip to the zoo.

We then scattered out for an hour to hunt, beachcomb, and dry out, since one boy had been tipped out into the surf in beaching the first boat. I was fortunate enough to get ashore^{dry} after shedding my shoes. The shell mounds here yielded the first dog remains--a perfect skull quite like those from San Nicolas. Some nice jaws of Guadalupe Fur Seal and a coracoid of D. Albatrus were found. Garth discovered two nice clean skulls of Stellers in fine condition except for the loss of teeth. All other pinniped skulls have thus far lost the facial parts entirely.

About eleven, we went back aboard the launch and set out the long net for Sea Lions. One end was sent ashore and the other kept by the anchored launch. The skiff then pulled along the foot of the rocky cliffs firing off the shot gun. The animals piled into the water with a terrific hubbub and after about an hour's milling around, we dragged in three young ones that were entangled. One of these that was innocently held jumped overboard after being taken into the skiff. I almost wished the others had before we got them safely crated for they are a wicked proposition slugging about in the boat tearing splinters out of the boards we shoved in their faces--striking here and there in the crowded boat. We finally got them onto the ship in time for a 2:30 lunch feeling that a full day's work had been done by all. Up with the anchor and away to Santa Barbara to pick up another passenger. We went through the Santa Rosa Channel which is only 5 miles wide and quite shallow. The formations on either side are much the same so it would appear that the islands have been separated rather a short time although the fauna does not so indicate. Quite a number of dark Petrels fell into our wake as we got into the main channel. They flew very much like melania though they could not be positively identified. This is pretty well north of their customary range. It is strange that Petrels have almost never followed the Scripps boats for any distance but the larger ships appear to attract them. We stopped off Santa Barbara for a couple of dredge hauls, then put in to anchor just before dark. Capt. Hancock went ashore in the launch to pick up Mr. Chaffey who is taking the remainder of the cruise with us. He is president of a chain of banks in S. California and Chairman of the U.S.C. Board of Trustees. A very pleasant gentleman whom the boys greeted with seeming pleasure.

Sept. 14/38, Wednesday.

We hove anchor at 6:00 and left for Prisoner's Harbor on Santa Cruz Id. where we spent the entire morning about the harbor and going up to the old Ranch House of Justinian Caire. Mr. Stanton, who recently purchased the entire holdings of the Caire heirs for 3/4 of a million--this includes the livestock, boat, some thousands of gallons of wine stored in the winery and quite a staff of workers of swarthy complexion. The grandson and namesake of old Justinian Caire is local charge; a handsome blue-eyed classic-looking young man, graduate of Berkeley. He recently brought his bride to the island to the ancestral home now owned by Stanton. They are devout Catholics and the purpose of our visit was for Capt. Hancock to donate a number of chapel fittings which had come from the private chapel in the Wilshire mansion now dismantled. The Captain is not a Catholic but his wife was. Mr. Stanton was also desirous of rejuvenating the old stone chapel at the ranch which had been unused since the Santa Barbara earthquake.

The ride up cañon on a truck was pretty bumpy underneath but the cañon is very beautiful even at this dry season. Some very old Eucalyptus groves that were mature enough to fit into the landscape in naturalistic manner. We had too short a time at our disposal to visit the ranch house proper which was regrettable. I saw a photograph of one gigantic, spreading conifer reported to be an European Cypress which was planted as a seed by the first Mrs. Caire. The old house down at the landing has a great deal of grill iron work about the windows and porch that was done by an old convict who learned the skill at the penitentiary. I wonder if Prisoner's Harbor is named from the fact that convicts worked there.

✓ Blue Jays, ✓ Shrikes, ✓ Doves, ✓ Killdeer, ✓ Tattlers, ✓ Linnets, ✓ Ravens, were seen about the harbor. One of the boys picked up the shell of a Paper Nautilus on the shore--the first I ever saw. Three very handsome Island Foxes were in a cage awaiting us to join the Zoo collection. They are very richly colored. Seventeen skunks had been trapped quite recently about the buildings.

Mr. Stanton is a lean, hawk-nosed man with a Texas flavor to some of his speech. He was out in overalls and Statson driving the truck and bossing a gang of laborers about the short wharf where the boat "Santa Cruz" was tied up. She is the same boat that Alden, Van and I went over on fifteen years ago.

About noon we headed back for the west end of San Miguel for another swing at the seals. We came to in the cover about 3:30 and thirteen Sea Elephants were plainly visible on part of the beach separate from the Sea Lion herd. They all took to water before we got near with the bunch. We landed with the two skiffs father down the beach at a distance from the Sea Lion herd, beached the boats and crates, arranged the nets; I picked up a 2 x 4 drift beam and we slowly approached the quiet Sea Lion herd. We got fairly close to them before they began moving down the slope. Then we rushed them. I got in ahead and ran between one big brute and the water and began prodding him back with my 2 x 4. He opened his jaws about a foot and splintered the end but I kept him entertained till the boys had the net over him. Then followed a lively scrimmage as he threshed, struggled, bellowed, and tried to wriggle to the water. He came near doing that very same before he was finally trussed up. Once he swung his head about, grabbed my lever and knocked me down completely. I did a hasty "barrel roll" to keep out from under him and away from his wicked jaws. Part of the gang went back up the shore to bring down a skiff.

We beached it and turned it up on edge beside the beast, rolled him up to the gunwale by aid of the lever and several men heaving, then tipped the skiff back and he rolled into the bottom where he was lashed down by many turns of line about both him and the boat. There was room for but one man now who pulled away to the launch with him. The rest of us had to be ferried by two added trips. The captive was towed back to the ship with one seaman in the skiff to guard him and help trim ship. We had to stop once and put on more lashings but finally he was hoisted aboard, skiff and all and a special crate built for him. He weighed in the close neighborhood of 1200 lbs. I for one was pretty well tuckered out by the time he was started on his way to the launch so while awaiting the return of the skiff to pick us up, I caterpillared my way across the sand spit toward the other herd. I was able to get within 50 ft. without rousing them and lay there watching them (and smelling them). Only when I called the other boys up did the animals show fear and move off. They were all California Sea Lions and we did not wish them. The much larger gtollari were the ones we were after. The two species here come out on the same beaches and rocks. I was not able to distinguish the younger individuals but the older ones are greatly different in size and are in general more golden or tawny. The color variation in the Californias is extreme. When dry on the beach, the adults may be dark mahogany, bay, sorrel, or nearly white.

Feces of the animals appear limey and smooth in texture as though the scales and bones of fish had been entirely digested. The odor was that of a pelican and comorant rookery.

Before we got away, a pair of Orcas came nosing among the Sea Lions, their long dorsal fins standing 3 ft. above the water. I was surprised that the sea lions did not rush ashore. They actually seemed to follow the big killers much as birds may try to mob an owl or a cat that has caught one of their number. The deafening hubbub of barking can't be heard by the killers to any extent.

While on the strand the Californias were able to gallop almost like dogs and made quite a speed. The Stellers are more common on the rocks than on the sand. Both do a lot of jumping from one rock to another and reach quite high points. They jump from these points and land flat-bellied in the water or often across rocks when hurried.

We finally got aboard about six p.m. and lay at anchor, planning to leave at 11:00 for the run to San Pedro where four of us will go ashore, the others going on to San Diego Thursday with the live animals. The Velero III runs at about 12 knots though she may be stopped up to 15 with less efficiency. We will be in San Pedro about 8:00 a.m. and in San Diego before dark.

Our party included besides Capt. Allan Hancock and his crew of more than a dozen, a scientific staff and visitors as follows:

Dr. Harry Wegforth)	
Dr. Lee Conti)	San Diego Zoo staff
Mr. Lester Olmstead)	

Dr. William Lloyd - Cabrillo Marine Museum

Mr. Jno. Garth - Secretary and Lecturer)	
Mr. Granville Ashcraft - Birds)	USC Student
Mr. Francis Elmore - Botany and Anthropology)	Assistants
Mr. Alex. Hill - Echinoids)	

Mr. Andrew Chaffey - Central Bank (visitor)
Professor Loya Miller, Zoology, UCLA